

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2544

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, US

SUBJECT: THE ISRAELI VIEW OF U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS

BEGIN SUMMARY: ISRAELI COMMENTATORS VIEW THE BURGEONING
CONTROVERSY OVER ADMINISTRATION OPPOSITION TO TRANSITIONAL
QUARTER FUNDING, A U.S./EGYPTIAN ARMS RELATIONSHIP, AND
AMBASSADOR SCRANTON'S UNSC SPEECH AS PRESAGING INCREASING
FRICTIONS IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. WHILE RABIN IN PUBLIC
STATEMENTS IS MINIMIZING DIMENSIONS OF FLAP N U.S./ISRAELI
RELATIONS OVER INTERIM AID ISSUE, PRESS AND OPPOSITION CLAIM
THAT MISHANDLING OF THE MATTER BY THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS
RESPONSIBLE FOR CURRENT TENSIONS WITH THE ADMINISTRATION.
LOOKING BEYOND 1976, MILITARY COMMENTATORS FORSEE THE DANGER
OF THE ARAB/ISRAELI MILITARY BALANCE SHIFTING TO ISRAEL'S
DISADVANTAGE. THE OPPOSITION LIKUD AND A NUMBER OF
JOURNALISTS BELIEVE THE U.S. WILL REACTIVATE THE ROGERS
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PLAN AFTER THE ELECTION, AND PRESS A DEPENDENT AND VULNER-

ABLE ISRAEL TO ACCEPT A "PAX AMERICANA" INCLUDING MAJOR TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS DETRIMENTAL TO ITS SECURITY. SOME LOCAL OBSERVERS THINK AN ISRAELI/U.S. CONFRONTATION IN THE YEARS AHEAD OVER THE GENERAL TREND OF U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY IS ALMOST UNAVOIDABLE. IN CONTRAST, RABIN BELIEVES THAT DESPITE DIFFERENCES THERE EXISTS A SIGNIFICANT MEASURE OF U.S./ISRAELI UNDERSTANDING, AND THAT A CONFRONTATION CAN EITHER BE AVOIDED OR DEFERRED. AS DIFFERENCES CONTINUE TO SURFACE, OPPOSITION ELEMENTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXPLOIT THE ANXIETY OF THE ISRAELI PUBLIC TO UNDERCUT RABIN'S DOMESTIC POSITION AND TO FAN SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE EROSION OF THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL. END SUMMARY

1. POST WAR REALITIES. THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC RECOGNIZE THAT THE OCTOBER WAR SIGNIFICANTLY DEEPENED ISRAEL'S DEPENDENCE ON THE U.S. BY ACCENTUATING ITS ISOLATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND BY MASSIVELY INCREASING ITS MILITARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS. APPRECIATION FOR POLITICAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT AND UNEASE IF NOT OUTRIGHT RESENTMENT AT ITS DEPENDENCY ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN, AND ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED WITH EACH OTHER. ISRAEL RELUCTANTLY IS BEGINNING TO ACCEPT ANOTHER UNCOMFORTABLE POSTWAR REALITY--THAT THE U.S. IS REESTABLISHING ITS POSITION IN THE ARAB WORLD AND PARTICULARLY IN EGYPT. THE ISRAELI ATTITUDE TO THIS DEVELOPMENT IS AMBIVALENT, COMBINING AWARENESS OF THE INTRINSIC DESIRABILITY OF EGYPT TURNING AWAY FROM THE SOVIET UNION TO THE WEST WITH A DEEPLY-FELT ANXIETY THAT THIS SHIFT IS COMING AT THE EXPENSE OF CLOSE U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS AND ISRAEL'S SECURITY.

2. U.S./EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF OUR INTENTION TO ESTABLISH A LIMITED ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPT CREATED A STORM IN ISRAEL (TEL AVIV 1987). THE DECISION TO SELL EGYPT SIX C-130 HERCULES AIRCRAFT WAS READ HERE AS THE WEDGE IN THE DOOR, PRESAGING A DEEPENING U.S./EGYPTIAN ARMS SUPPLY LINK AFTER THE ELECTION. CHARACTERISTIC OF THE ISRAELI REACTION AFTER-THE-FACT, ISRAEL'S LEADING MILITARY CORRESPONDENT HAS RECENTLY WRITTEN THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT OUGHT TO HAVE SOUGHT TO LINK U.S. ARMS TO EGYPT WITH A FINAL POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. ISRAELI COMMENTATORS HAVE EXPRESSED

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CONCERN THAT ISRAEL IN THE YEARS AHEAD WILL CONFRONT A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST ARMS BALANCE TURNING PROGRESSIVELY TO ITS DISADVANTAGE. THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MORE MODERATE FORCES FAVOR SEEKING A "COMPROMISE" WITH THE U.S. WHICH WOULD SLOW DOWN THE PACE OF ARMS SALES, CONTROL THE TYPES OF WEAPONS INVOLVED AND LINK THEIR TRANSFER TO PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS. THE OPPOSITION LIKUD ON THIS AS ON OTHER ISSUES PREDICTABLY FAVORS A SHARPER CONFRONTATION.

3. SCRANTON'S UNSC SPEECH. COMING ON THE HEELS OF THE ARMS SUPPLY UPROAR, THE MARCH 23 UNSC SPEECH WAS SEIZED ON AS FURTHER INDICATION OF THE WINDS OF CHANGE IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. THE PRESS AND POLITICIANS JUMPED ON IT WITH ALARM AS FORESHADOWING THE ACTIVE REVIVAL OF THE ROGERS PLAN AFTER THE U.S. ELECTION. THEY CHARGED THAT THE U.S. WAS NO LONGER AN IMPARTIAL MEDIATOR BUT HAD SIDED WITH THE ARAB DEMAND FOR A RETURN TO THE 1967 BORDERS. THE SURFACING IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL OF THE SEMI-SUBMERGED U.S./ISRAELI DISAGREEMENTS ON THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM AND SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES WAS INTERPRETED AS VIOLATING SINAI II UNDERSTANDINGS AND UNDERCUTTING RABIN'S CLAIM OF EFFECTIVE POLITICAL COORDINATION. THE ISRAELI REACTION WAS DEFIANT, WITH THE PRINCIPAL POINTS OF EMPHASIS BEING THAT JERUSALEM WOULD NEVER BE REDIVIDED AND THAT SETTLEMENT POLICY WAS BASED ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS.

4. TRANSITIONAL FUNDING FLAP. THE PRESIDENT'S OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED TRANSITIONAL QUARTER AID FOR ISRAEL HAS ALSO EVOKED CONCERN ABOUT THE TREND OF U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, ISRAEL HAD HOPED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD NOT ACTIVELY OPPOSE CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVES FOR TRANSITIONAL QUARTER FUNDING. THE OPPOSITION AND ELEMENTS IN THE PRESS HOSTILE TO RABIN ARE CHARGING HIM WITH RESPONSIBILITY NOT ONLY FOR THE CURRENT FLAP OVER INTERIM AID BUT FOR FAILING TO FORESEE OR REACT TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF ISRAEL'S DEEPENING DEPENDENCY ON ITS POLITICAL/SECURITY INTERESTS. ONE COMMENTATOR HAS WRITTEN THAT THE ISRAELI PUBLIC'S DISAPPOINTMENT WITH RABIN WHICH MAY ULTIMATELY TOPPLE HIM IS OVER THE DETERIORATION IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS.

5. ISRAELI CONCERNS. LOCAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT AFTER THE CONFIDENTIAL

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1976 ELECTION THE U.S. WILL APPLY PRESSURE TO A PROGRESSIVELY MORE VULNERABLE ISRAEL FOR FURTHER CONCESSIONS. SOME RIGHT-WING COMMENTATORS BELIEVE A U.S./ISRAELI CONFRONTATION IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO IS UNAVOIDABLE. RABIN ON THE OTHER HAND BELIEVES THE EVOLVING SITUATION IS LESS CLEAR-CUT, THAT ISRAEL CAN INFLUENCE THE COURSE OF U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS, AND THAT A CONFRONTATION EITHER CAN BE AVOIDED OR DEFERRED. AS FRICTIONS CONTINUE, THE LIKUD OPPOSITION AND THE MASS-CIRCULATION AFTERNOON PRESS CAN BE COUNTED ON TO EXPLOIT TENSIONS IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS TO UNDERCUT RABIN'S DOMESTIC STANDING AND THESE PRESSURES, IN TURN, WILL INFLUENCE THE TENOR OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE.

6. CONCLUSION. U.S. EFFORTS TO SEEK FURTHER NEGOTIATED AGREEMENTS, DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI ARMS

BALANCE, AND THE TUG OF WAR OVER AID LEVELS ARE LIKELY
TO LEAD TO CONTINUING TENSIONS IN U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS. THE
MEDIA AND THE RIGHT-WING WILL INTENSIFY THEIR CAMPAIGN OF
FANNING PUBLIC SUSPICIONS OF U.S. INTENTIONS BY CLAIMING THAT
SPECIFIC DISAGREEMENTS REPRESENT AN EROSION OF
THE BASIC U.S. COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL. IN SUM, THE TASK OF
BALANCING OUR COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL WITH THE DEVELOPING
OF OUR INTERESTS IN EGYPT AND OTHER MODERATE ARAB STATES
MAY INVOLVE DEEPENING STRAINS IN U.S./ ISRAELI RELATIONS--
BUT THESE ARE, WE BELIEVE, MANAGEABLE.
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